

VZCZCXRO0235
PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR
DE RUEHMS #1026/01 3111149
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 071149Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8951
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MUSCAT 001026

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/07/2017
TAGS: [PINT](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [KWMN](#) [MU](#)
SUBJECT: POST-ELECTION ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPMENTS

REF: A. MUSCAT 992
[B. MUSCAT 979](#)
[C. MUSCAT 931](#)
[D. MUSCAT 742](#)
[E. MUSCAT 181](#)
[F. 06 MUSCAT 1468](#)

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Many Omanis continue to comment favorably on the successful October 27 national elections for Oman's Majlis al-Shura. Approximately 70% of the new Majlis member hold a bachelor's degree or higher. According to contacts, some vote-buying did occur and a few voters in several districts reportedly fell off the registration rolls due to technical errors, but without noticeable impact on the electoral outcome. A solid majority of winning candidates was backed by an informal alliance of leaders from major tribes. Candidates from outside this tribal network, however, managed to pick up more seats in the Majlis than in 2003. Campaigning in some districts was intense, with candidates sometimes pushing, or even exceeding, the limits of permissible campaign activities. There was widespread public disappointment, reflected in the local press, that no women were elected to the Majlis. As expected by many, the Sultan increased the number of women in the newly appointed Majlis al-Dawla from nine to 14. End Summary.

A SUCCESSFUL ELECTION ...

[1](#)2. (C) More than one week since the national elections for the Majlis al-Shura, Omanis are still commenting on how smoothly the voting process was conducted and the larger than anticipated turn out of registered voters (ref A). To post's knowledge, only one losing candidate -- a woman who garnered relatively few votes -- has filed a grievance with the government to contest the results in her district, alleging that two of her competitors spread a rumor that she had withdrawn from the race. Although the winning candidates are not, on average, much younger than the membership of the outgoing Majlis, they are better educated: roughly 60% hold a bachelor's degree, while another 10% hold a master's degree or higher (two have earned a Ph.D.). An additional 20%, approximately, have completed secondary school. This stands in sharp contrast to claims that many previous Majlis members were functionally illiterate or close to it. (Note: Of the 70 members of the outgoing Majlis al-Shura who ran for re-election, 38 were successful. End Note.)

... BUT NOT PERFECT

¶3. (C) Below the surface of the vote, however, a few cracks are evident. Contacts report that a limited number of voters in several districts -- perhaps as many as 50 in some heavily populated areas -- who had participated in the 2003 elections were turned away from the polls for failing to appear on the registration lists, even though they should have been automatically registered to vote in 2007. (Note: Registered voters for the 2003 elections were not required to re-register to cast ballots in 2007. End Note.) It appears, however, that these deletions were caused solely by technical glitches and did not occur in sufficient number to alter the outcome of any of the electoral races. Moreover, all Omanis were able to check in advance whether they were on the registration rolls by accessing a computer website or reviewing hard copies of relevant lists posted in local government offices.

¶4. (C) Anecdotal evidence indicates that small-scale vote-buying -- also present during the 2003 elections -- occurred in some districts, but did not decisively influence any electoral contest. While it is not possible to gauge the extent of this practice, contacts report that the exchange of money for votes was overall very limited and firmly resisted by many candidates. Furthermore, when it did occur, the exchanges were allegedly for nominal amounts (between USD 15 and 25) and were often initiated by voters -- usually poor Omanis -- who requested money from a candidate or a "broker."

TRIBALISM NOT ALWAYS SUPREME

MUSCAT 00001026 002 OF 003

¶5. (C) In keeping with past practice, leaders of major tribal groups gathered together in different areas of Oman well before the elections to try to reach consensus on which candidates (presumably from their membership) to support. As in prior elections, backing from one of these "tribal alliances" was determinative in many races; a majority of winning candidates were the consensus choice of the most important tribes in their districts. (Note: None of the tribal alliances reportedly threw their weight behind a female candidate, which may explain why no women were elected to the Majlis al-Shura. End Note.)

¶6. (C) More candidates without the backing of large tribal groups, however, won a seat in the Majlis than in 2003. A number of prominent tribal sheiks in the al Batinah region, for example, did not succeed in their electoral bids. According to contacts, two main factors contributed to this shift. First, the large tribes overestimated their numbers and/or their percentage of the registered electorate in some districts and thus mistakenly thought that their preferred candidates could coast to victory with little effort. Second, the loosening of campaign restrictions by the government allowed energetic candidates without the backing of the big tribes to significantly broaden their visibility among voters.

PUSHING THE LIMITS

¶7. (C) Intense campaigning was a key factor in the success of winning candidates from outside the large tribes. In the southern city of Salalah, one of the election victors (and the brother of one of post's Locally Engage Staff Omani employees) from a relatively small family clan attributed his win to his fervent campaign work. In the week preceding the election, he explained, he was busy from morning until late at night calling at different homes, social events, and cafes to talk to extended family members, friends and campaign

supporters, as well as their friends and families.

¶8. (C) Although the government continued to ban large-scale public campaign events and certain other activities, some candidates reportedly pushed, and in certain cases exceeded, the bounds of legally allowable campaigning. A wealthy supporter of the election winner in Salalah referenced above, for example, hosted a gathering in his mansion of almost 300 people -- telling invited guests to bring whoever they wanted along -- to better acquaint them with his candidate (although he did notify the local elections committee in advance). In apparent contravention to relevant regulations, a few candidates printed and distributed brochures, while others used microphones to address large numbers of people drawn to public tents set up near the middle of towns. In some cases the relevant local elections authorities acted to stop impermissible or questionable activities. But more often than not, according to contacts, these committees did not intervene, especially if they received advance notice of the action in question and it was not a clearly egregious violation.

WHERE ARE THE WOMEN?

¶9. (U) Since the elections, many Omanis have commented on their disappointment that no female candidates won their electoral campaigns. (Note: The government claims that almost half of those casting votes were women. End Note.) This has been reflected in the local press. An editorial writer in the October 29 edition of government-owned Arabic daily "Oman" stated that, "Democracy is deprived of the presence of women in the Majlis (al-Shura); in my opinion, this absence of women will hinder the progress of the Majlis." An op-ed in independent Arabic daily "Shabiba" on October 30 asserted that "because the voice of women is extremely important" to the consultative process, "there must be a quota for women to guarantee their representation."

¶10. (U) On November 3, Minister of Social Development Dr. Sharifa al-Yahya'ee (one of 3 female Omani ministers) told a gathering of failed women election candidates that her ministry "is going to do its best in encouraging women to run successful and organized campaigns in the next Shura elections, in cooperation with other public and private entities." In an interview with USG-supported Radio Sawa (found only on-line in Oman), Raheela al-Riyami -- one of two women in the outgoing Majlis al-Shura -- urged Omani women not to be discouraged with the voting results and to continue their participation in the political process. She also

MUSCAT 00001026 003 OF 003

rejected criticism of the elections, saying that they were conducted in a fair and transparent manner and reflected the will of Omani voters.

A NEW UPPER HOUSE

¶11. (SBU) Many Omanis believed that Sultan Qaboos would react to the failure of women to capture even a single seat in the Majlis al-Shura by expanding their presence in the next Majlis al-Dawla (the upper house of Oman's bicameral consultative body). Their predictions were correct. In the evening of November 5, the government announced that the Sultan had appointed a new Majlis al-Dawla of 70 Omanis that included 14 women, versus 9 of 61 members in the previous group.

¶12. (SBU) Eight of the women in the new upper house are carry-overs from the outgoing Majlis al-Dawla. Of the 14 Ph.D. holders in the incoming membership, eight are female. Interestingly, from information available to post, three of the new female members appear to be the only Shi'a in the

Majlis al-Dawla. (Note: Based on family names and other information, post believes that only two members of the new Majlis al-Shura are Shi'a. End Note.)

COMMENT

¶13. (C) For two years, post pursued a campaign preparation program for Omani women under the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI). About 10-12 months ago, the Omani government made clear that it was not interested. We can now righteously claim that this election's disappointing outcome with respect to female candidates might have been averted had we been able to conduct the training. Post will look for an appropriate time, in coordination with MEPI, to again propose this program.
GRAPPO